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They also deserve to receive the benefits and the health care that they need and have earned.

We are all aware of the crisis facing VA health care. Veterans are waiting unconscionable lengths of time for appointments. The President's now out-of-date Web site claims his fiscal year 2004 budget, the year we are in, which Congress increased by \$1.3 billion last year, would enable the VA to eliminate the waiting lists by the summer of 2004, this summer. Well, that is not the truth. That is not going to happen. Instead, VA hospitals are struggling to meet increasing demand; and year after year, my colleagues and I have to fight to increase the underfunded VA budget.

Veterans in rural States, such as Maine, face all of these problems, amplified by the fact that they may have to travel hundreds of miles to the nearest VA health facility.

Maine's single VA hospital, Togus, is located 100 miles from our southern border and 300 miles from our northern border. As anyone familiar with the cold and snowy winters will tell you, those kinds of distances are difficult, not to mention dangerous, to travel in the winter.

The VA has established access guidelines which provide that a veteran should be able to access primary care within 30 miles or 30 minutes from their homes in urban areas, and 60 miles or 60 minutes in rural areas. Only 59 percent of Maine veterans enrolled in the VA health care system meet those guidelines, and that means that more than 16,000 Maine veterans live outside the access standards, not to mention the veterans who have not even enrolled to get VA health care. Perhaps one of the reasons they do not seek VA health care is because they are so far away.

The VA's guidelines for access to inpatient hospital services provide that a veteran should live within 2 hours of inpatient services. Only 52 percent of Maine veterans meet this guideline.

Let me give you an example of what this all means in my State. Veterans in Maine, veterans have to travel to get specialized care, often to a Boston VA hospital; and if a veteran lives in the northern part of the State, say Caribou or Fort Kent, he probably cannot make a bus trip to Boston in one day. He will have to stay overnight in Bangor or Portland and take the rest of the ride the next day. On the third day, the veteran may finally have his appointment, and then either start back that day or the next day.

So you can see to get specialized care in Boston, a veteran from northern Maine may take 3 to 5 days to go down and get that care. Of course, a relative or friend may make the drive, and it might happen in 2 days or 2½ days instead of 3 to 5; but the problem is, how many people can afford to do that, how many people have the help they need?

We need to enable veterans living in the most rural parts of our country to

benefit from the same accessibility to services that veterans in more urban areas enjoy. In Maine, the VA staff did town hall meetings throughout the State to develop a market plan for the VA CARES process, and this plan recommended five new community-based outpatient clinics in rural areas to improve access, in addition to collaborating with the State's successful telemedicine program and to the continued use of contract care.

I urge my colleagues to take to heart these difficulties faced by veterans in rural areas. Expanding access to care, particularly in these rural areas, must be a focal point of our efforts to reduce the huge backlog of veterans waiting for health care.

As we consider the fiscal year 2005 budget and when we review the final CARES national plan, we must not let down our Nation's veterans. First, they deserve the highest quality of care, but we also must ensure that the VA health system provides access to that care for all veterans.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURGESS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

WASHINGTON WASTE WATCHERS REPORT ON TRANSPORTATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HENSARLING) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HENSARLING. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as cofounder of the Washington Waste Watchers, a Republican working group dedicated to bringing the disinfectant of sunshine into the shadowy corners of the wasteful Washington bureaucracy.

As we speak, Congress is engaged in a debate over spending and the Federal budget. With a historically large deficit, Democrats are advocating that our answer is to raise taxes on American families. Democrats demand that we roll back tax relief, the tax relief that is responsible for the strong growth in our economy, the tax relief that is bringing down unemployment, the tax relief that amounts to only 1 percent, 1 percent, of the \$28.3 trillion, 10-year spending plan that we passed last year.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, 99 percent of the challenge in dealing with our Federal deficit is on the spending side. Clearly we have a spending problem, not a taxing problem in America; and I, for one, say when it comes to Federal spending, it is time to take out the trash. It is time to go after the costly waste, fraud and abuse that permeates every nook and cranny of the Federal Government.

Mr. Speaker, this body will soon take up the issue of transportation funding. Transportation is important. It is important to our economy; it is important to jobs. But before we sign a huge check drawn on the bank account of American families, should we not do everything that we can to ensure that every dime of transportation funding goes to roads, and not rip-offs?

Let me give you just a few examples. The Department of Transportation has historically squandered the hard-earned money of American families. Roughly two-thirds of Boston's "Big Dig" central artery is funded by Federal tax dollars. This has been called the greatest public works scandal of modern times.

This federally funded project has repeatedly exceeded cost estimates and lagged behind schedule. Is that not a surprise? But in the year 2000, the project was already five times more expensive than planned, \$11 billion over budget. An investigation revealed that project managers consistently were dishonest in their reporting of the project. \$11 billion of bloated budgets and mismanagement, and yet Democrats want to raise our taxes to pay for more of this?

Today the Federal Government is picking up 80 percent of the cost for a \$1.4 million project to upgrade just three bus shelters in upstate New York. For more than \$1 million of American taxpayers' hard-earned money, these bus shelters are going to be equipped with "radiant heating systems" and a layout "designed to appeal to passengers' sense of security." Even some of the beneficiaries of these new mansion-like bus shelters had concerns with its cost. One of the residents said, It just seems like a whole lot of money to me. Maybe they could just put some glass doors up.

American families are lucky if they can afford \$150,000 for a home, and the Federal Government is going to use their money to pay over \$370,000 apiece for bus shelters? And yet Democrats want to raise our taxes to pay for more of this?

Another investigation revealed that 29 Federal contracts worth roughly \$62 million were paid without any knowledge of whether they were even legally authorized. \$62 million that was not legally authorized, and yet Democrats want to raise our taxes to pay for more of this?

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few examples of the rampant waste, fraud and abuse and duplication in just one Federal agency. After you begin to look closely, you will discover that in many Federal programs, routinely they will squander 10, 20, even 30 percent of their taxpayer-funded budgets, and have for years.

There are many ways that we can save money in Washington without cutting any needed services and without raising taxes on our hard-working families, as Democrats seek to do. Because when it comes to spending, Mr.